

By Kevin Pozzi



Located off of Foster Road in the Lents neighborhood of outer southeast Portland, Zenger Farm sits almost dormant on a cloudy, chilly February afternoon. The sixteen-acre urban farm and protected wetland remains quiet save for a few clucking hens and a volunteer diligently pruning a row of Italian plum trees.

“We are here to help plants and animals express their true nature!” Zenger Farm Development Director Laleña Dolby explains, referencing a similar mantra from farmer, author, and activist Joel Salatin. “Our job is not to be in control as is often the case with conventional agriculture, but rather to observe and work with our natural systems.”

Incorporated as a nonprofit in 1999, Friends of Zenger Farm holds as its mission a dedication to ‘promoting sustainable food systems, environmental stewardship and local economic development through a working urban farm.’ Prior to its incorporation, the property was a

century-old family farm passed through multiple owners until the City of Portland purchased the land in the mid 1990's.

Now on a 50-year lease from the City, Zenger Farm hosts summer camps, farm field trips, and workshops on topics like healthy eating, composting, beekeeping, preserving food, and garden planning. The organization incorporates both sustainability and food access into their work, utilizing solar power and water cisterns to keep power and water usage low, while also founding the nearby Lents International Farmer's Market in an effort to see that healthy food reaches those who need it most.

"Zenger Farm is really trying to be a model nationwide for our work, but at the same time, wants to make sure we are serving our population here in the Lents neighborhood."

Much of the work on the farm is accomplished by volunteers, with a few hundred estimated to contribute their talents each year. Beyond these tangible and local effects, the organization hopes the broader impact of their work will shine through.

"I think the role of a place like Zenger Farm is to offer the opportunity to do something different, to do it more creatively, to add a certain spark," she explains, taking back the knowledge she's heard from lifelong farmers who may not be aware of new methods. "As a nonprofit, we are afforded opportunities through grant money that farmers may not be able to because of limited resources."

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